



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
FACULTY OF MUSIC

Faculty Artist Series

AN EVENING OF FRENCH CHAMBER MUSIC

Jacques Israelievitch, violin

Teng Li, viola

Shauna Rolston, cello

Henri-Paul Sicsic, piano

Friday, February 6, 2009

7:30 pm. Walter Hall



**Faculty Artist Series
presents**

AN EVENING OF FRENCH CHAMBER MUSIC

Jacques Israelievitch, violin

Teng Li, viola

Shauna Rolston, cello

Henri-Paul Sicsic, piano

Piano Quartet in A, Op. 30

Animé

Très calme

Simple et sans hâte

Animé

Ernest Chausson

(1855-1899)

- INTERMISSION -

Piano Quartet in C minor, Op. 15

Allegro molto moderato

Scherzo: Allegro vivo

Adagio

Allegro molto

Gabriel Fauré

(1845-1924)

A portion of the ticket revenues from the Faculty Artist Series will be used to fund student awards at the Faculty of Music.

This concert is performed on the Edith McConica Steinway piano.

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Program Notes

ERNEST CHAUSSON (1855-1899)
Piano Quartet in A, Op. 30

"To attain self-belief is a life's work." That's what the French composer Ernest Chausson wrote in his diary towards the end of his own relatively short life – which was curtailed, tragically, by a bicycle accident. Self-belief for Chausson came slowly, helped, in no small measure, by the success of his *Concert in D, for violin, piano and string quartet* which he wrote between 1889 and 1891. Doubts in his desired career path were sown early on when his well-off family insisted on law school rather than the music conservatory. Chausson complied with their wishes, gaining a doctorate in law and being sworn in as a barrister at the French court of appeal in Paris. His earlier education had given him an enthusiasm for literature and he wrote short stories and the best part of a novel before graduation. He also drew well, according to those who have seen his sketchbooks. Like Mendelssohn, Chausson had grown up in a cultured, protected environment, privately tutored, learning the great works of art, music and literature through private salons and distinguished family friends. Unlike Mendelssohn, however, Chausson came late to music and found it difficult to throw off the feeling – both within himself and among those around him – that he didn't need to make a living by composing. He remained comfortably (though not extravagantly) well-off throughout his life and was often approached by the music community to help individuals and organizations in need.

Still, by the time he was qualified to go into law practice, Chausson had already written his first song, *Lilas*, and felt that musical training was what he now needed. Massenet gave him instrumentation lessons at the Conservatoire. Here, he also attended Franck's organ lessons, which were, essentially, composition seminars where an entire generation of French composers came to learn from their beloved "Pater seraphicus." Even after musical training, Chausson had still more of a struggle in finding himself as a composer. The reason was the totally intoxicating effect that the music of Wagner had on him when he traveled to Munich

and Bayreuth to see productions of *The Ring*, the première of *Parsifal* and several other Wagner operas. He even took his new bride to Bayreuth by way of a honeymoon to see a further performance of *Parsifal*. From Wagner, Chausson drew strength and confidence, and from Franck he acquired the technique of cyclical composition. Both composers were to remain firmly in his mind as he worked on the Piano Quartet in the summer of 1897, less than two years before his premature death.

Its opening movement gives an impression of constantly evolving out of two main ideas. The first is a purposeful, striding pentatonic theme, initially presented in octaves on the piano, briefly punctuated by chords from the strings. It's a flexible theme and will be molded into melodies that are now languorous, now more muscular. Chausson re-worked his second theme from an incomplete piece for oboe and viola with the accompaniment of piano and string quartet – evidently a successor to the *Concert*, for violin, piano and string quartet. This second theme is also in the major key. But it is more melancholy, first falling, then rising and building to an impassioned climax in the central development section of the first movement's sonata structure. The young Debussy, whom Chausson supported financially (in Debussy's words: "as a big, elder brother"), had perceptive things to say about Chausson's seamless melodic writing and apparent need to constantly enrich the textures of his scores. "You bring such heavy pressure to bear on your musical ideas," he wrote, "that they dare not present themselves to you in their natural guise for fear of not being suitably dressed. . . . A thing I should like to see you lose is your preoccupation with the inner parts."

A noble theme on viola opens the songlike second movement. This ternary form structure is one of Chausson's finest, most radiant movements. "Written with consummate skill," his colleague Vincent D'Indy wrote after his death, "this movement will ever retain a poignant effect for all who have artistic sensibility." For all his absorption in the music of Wagner and the circle of composers around Franck, Chausson realised as early as the late 1880s that "de-Wagnerisation is necessary." In the third movement of the Piano Quartet he achieves

this by turning to the past and to the music of the French composers of the 18th century. The movement, which takes the place of a scherzo, is modally coloured and supple. Its music has the grace of a Fauré and its distinctive, essentially French musical language was calculated to appeal to the ideals of the Société Nationale de Musique of which Chausson was founding joint secretary with D'Indy. Its theme is further developed as the finale opens, now urgent and agitated. A more reflective second theme is related to the melancholy second theme of the opening movement, further adding to the cyclical structure of the quartet. As the movement progresses, Chausson reintroduces material from the second movement and further integrates his thematic material. A powerful coda brings together many of the themes from the quartet.

GABRIEL FAURÉ (1845-1924)
Piano Quartet in C minor, Op. 15

Fauré managed to blend a deep awareness of musical tradition with a secure independence of thought. At the centre of his individuality lies a quite daring harmonic inventiveness. His music flows with an apparent effortlessness that – paradoxically – can only have resulted from great concentration of effort and clarity of thought. He once said that the whole process of writing music was “like a sticking door that I have to open.” Fauré’s music has a sensual beauty. It is Apollonian in its ideal. It avoids the obvious. Its demands are often virtuoso, but virtuosity for its own sake, in the way that Liszt could relish virtuosity, was light years away from Fauré’s musical world.

Fauré composed the first of his two piano quartets in 1877, on the rebound from his

prolonged courtship of Marianne Viardot, the youngest daughter in a musical family. (Her mother, Pauline, was a famous contralto, also a composer and lover of the novelist Turgenev). After five years, Marianne agreed to become engaged. When the two were separated for three weeks in the summer, Fauré wrote 35 letters to her. Less than four months later, she returned the letters and broke off the relationship. Fauré, heart broken, kept the letters until the end of his life.

The Piano Quartet, Fauré’s best-known chamber work, begins purposefully. Its first theme is assertive, confident and modally flavoured; the second, more questioning and lyrical. Then a surprising thing happens as the central development section begins. Fauré transforms his energetic first theme into something much more dreamy and barcarolle-like. The effect, as the music progresses and we hear both versions, is that the music appears constantly to evolve. The elegant Scherzo is a joy. Gossamer light and constantly flickering in the half-light, it displays Fauré’s deftness of touch to its best advantage. Deep emotions rise to the surface in the great slow movement which is marked throughout by a feeling of profound grief – perhaps this is an example of art mirroring life. The finale returns to the energy of the opening. A powerful, galloping movement, it asserts steely determination and is not afraid to wear its heart on its sleeve. Fauré destroyed an earlier closing movement, as he did most of his sketches.

The public première of the work took place in Paris at the Société Nationale on February 14, 1880; the revised version followed April 5, 1884, in both cases with Fauré as pianist.

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Comments welcomed: khnotes@sympatico.ca

NEXT ON FACULTY ARTIST SERIES

Jamie Parker & Friends

Music by Brahms and Clara and Robert Schumann.
 Friday, February 27, 2009 - 7:30 pm. Walter Hall.

Biographies



Henri-Paul Sicsic is equally respected as a teacher, a mentor to his students, and as a pianist, striving to be the living demonstration of his own teaching and learning.

In 2005, he received the Killam Teaching Prize, one of the highest academic honours awarded in Canada, supported by colleagues, students and alumni.

Sicsic taught at Rice University from 1986 to 1992 as the associate of eminent pianist John Perry. He was a member of the piano faculty at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver for thirteen years. His strong commitment to teaching and ability to enrich and inspire young talents is legendary. His students have distinguished themselves at the national and international levels, winning prestigious Fulbright and Canada Council grants and top prizes and awards at major competitions. His teachers include Juliette Audibert-Lambert (a student of Gabriel Fauré and Alfred Cortot), Pierre Sancan (professor at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Paris and recipient of the First Grand Prix de Rome of Composition), and renowned pianist and master teacher John Perry.

At the Conservatoire de Nice, France, Sicsic was awarded a first prize with honours in piano, a first prize in chamber music, and a conducting diploma. As a pianist, he also received a first prize at the Grand Prix de la Ville de Nice Competition and top prize at the Royaume de la Musique National Radio Competition in France.

A concerto soloist, recitalist and chamber musician, pianist Henri-Paul Sicsic has appeared with the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, Maryland Symphony Orchestra, Pasadena Philharmonic, Okanagan Symphony Orchestra, Abbotsford Symphony Orchestra and the Orchestre Philharmonique de Nice, among others. His performances have been aired in New York City on WQXR radio, on the National French program "France Musique" in other major centers in the U.S. and on the CBC.

Sicsic joined the Faculty of Music, University of Toronto in July 2007. He is a proponent of the Alexander Technique and also studies Tai Chi Chuan. He enjoys French cuisine and is an avid runner.



Internationally renowned violinist **Jacques Israelievitch** is one of the most distinguished performing artists in North America and abroad. After making his debut on French National

Radio at the age of eleven, Mr. Israelievitch went on to graduate from the Paris Conservatory at sixteen and was subsequently prizewinner at the International Paganini Competition. His teachers include Henryk Szeryng, Janos Starker, William Primrose, and Josef Gingold.

As a soloist, Mr. Israelievitch has collaborated with Solti, Giulini, Slatkin, Davis, and Frühbeck de Burgos, appearing with many of the world's major orchestras. As a distinguished chamber musician, he has performed with Emanuel Ax, Yefim Bronfman, and Yo-Yo Ma, and is violinist for the twice Naumburg Award recipient New Arts Trio.

Mr. Israelievitch served as Concertmaster of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra for a record-setting twenty years, and was formerly Assistant Concertmaster of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra for six years and Concertmaster of the Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra for ten years. He is currently chair of strings at the Chautauqua Institution and a full-time faculty member at York University in Toronto. In growing demand as a conductor, he has been Music Director of the Koffler Chamber Orchestra since 2005.

Mr. Israelievitch's discography features more than 100 albums including the Juno Award nominated *Suite Hebraïque* and the first-ever complete recording of Kreutzer's *42 Studies* for solo violin. He has premiered and recorded several concertos such as R. Murray Schafer's *The Darkly Splendid Earth: The Lonely Traveler*.

In 2004, the French government named Mr. Israelievitch Officer of the Order of Arts and Letters. He is also the recipient of a Lifetime Achievement Award for his distinguished contribution to the performing arts in Canada.



Twenty-two year old violist **Teng Li** is the recipient of numerous awards, including first prize at both the Johannson International and the Holland-

America Music Society

competitions, and second prize at the 2003 Primrose International Viola and Irving M. Klein International String competitions. She is also a winner of the Astral Artistic Services 2003 National Auditions.

She recently gave her recital debut in Philadelphia. She also performed on the Rising Stars series at the Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts in Philadelphia, and on Chicago's Dame Myra Hess concert series. She has appeared with the National Chamber Orchestra, the Santa Rosa Symphony, and the Haddonfield Symphony and was presented in recital for the French Embassy in Beijing. Her performances have been broadcast on NPR, WQXR, WHYY, and WFMT.

An accomplished chamber musician, Ms. Li has participated in various festivals, including the Marlboro Music Festival, Niagara International Chamber Music Festival, Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival, and Music from Angel Fire. She has appeared in the Rising Stars at the Caramoor Festival. Last season, she was presented in concert with the Guarneri quartet in New York, and performed chamber music at Weill Recital Hall and the 92nd St. Y.

Ms. Li began playing the violin at age five in her native China, and at age 12 transferred her attention to viola. She entered the Central Conservatory in Beijing in 1992, and by age sixteen was accepted to study at the Curtis Institute of Music, where her teachers were Michael Tree and Joseph DePasquale. She became principal violist of the Toronto symphony in 2004.



Having been named "Young Artist to Watch" by Musical America and the youngest recipient of the Pro Musicis International Award, celebrated cellist **Shauna Rolston** is considered one of the

most compelling musicians of her generation. She has been praised for the ease and naturalness of her technique, her pure intonation, and her ability to produce a huge tone and to play with great delicacy.

Following formative studies at the Banff Centre, Shauna Rolston earned undergraduate (Art) and graduate (Music) degrees at Yale where she studied with the distinguished cellist and pedagogue, Aldo Parisot. She also served as his teaching assistant.

Since making her New York City Town Hall debut at the age of 16, Ms Rolston performs regularly around the world. She has collaborated with many of the world's most renowned conductors and has given the world premiere of an astounding number of works - many written for her. A prolific recording artist, her discography includes *This is the Colour of My Dreams* which won Best Classical CD at the West Coast Music Awards, and two CDs that are included on a list of *13 Cello Recordings to Please Discriminating Audiophiles* (Benjamin Ivry). Her recording of Elgar's cello concerto was hailed by *Classic CD Magazine* as "...the most remarkable performance of the last 20 years." Shauna's latest CD *Shauna and Friends* features arrangements of popular classics by Claude Kenneson.

As a chamber musician, Shauna has performed and recorded with pre-eminent artists and ensembles including pianist Menahem Pressler and the Gallois Quintet. Her recent artistic partnership with pianist/composer Heather Schmidt began in 2002 at the Winnipeg New Music Festival and developed with performances as part of the Governor General of Canada's state delegation visit to Finland and Iceland and a tour of the Maritime Provinces through Debut Atlantic. Current and upcoming performances include recitals across North America ending with a tour of Quebec through Piano Plus.

Shauna's artistic scope is broad. Her latest video *A Pairing of Swans* was nominated for a Gemini award, and two of her previous videos *smokin f-holes* and *Words Fail* are featured regularly on BRAVO. Ongoing projects include four recordings, a profile interview for BIOGRAPHY, and a film *Synchronicity* (RedStar) for Bravo! which explores the remarkable artistic partnership between Shauna and Heather Schmidt. She is also featured in *The Great Cellists* (Margaret Campbell) and the soon to be released *The Popular Guide to Women in Classical Music* (Anne Gray).

In addition to performance, Ms. Rolston is a passionate educator, much in demand as a guest master class instructor. She is Professor of Cello and Co-Head of the String Department at the University of Toronto and a Visiting Artist for the Music and Sound Programs at The Banff Centre.

Thank you for your support!

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